

OBITUARY JULIAN RALPH FORD

Julian Ralph Ford died on 31 January 1986 at his home in Lesmurdie. He was born in Perth on 3 November 1932.

Although he had a life-long interest in natural history he chose to major in physical and organic chemistry at the University of Western Australia, where he graduated as Bachelor of Science in 1955. In 1960 and 1967 he passed Zoology 20 and 30 at the UWA, and in 1971 he passed Digital Computing 20 at the Western Australian Institute of Technology.

From 1956 to 1959 he worked as a chemist with the Shell Oil Company. He lectured in physical chemistry in the Technical Education Service of the W.A. Department of Education from 1960 to 1962, at the Perth Technical College from 1963 to 1967 and at the W.A. Institute of Technology (now the Curtin University of Technology) from 1968 until his death.

As a youth he observed birds in the Fremantle district, taking a special interest in the birds of Bibra Lake and the breeding of the Yellow-rumped Thornbill. After graduating he began a long-term study of the birds and reptiles of coastal areas between Yanchep and Kalbarri, including the offshore islands north to the Beagles. In this period he discovered (with the late Brian Teague) the northern population of the White-breasted Robin. By now he was collecting specimens. With his fine series of Variegated and Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens he demonstrated once and for all that these two birds were full species and not merely colour morphs of a single species.

Although he continued to study the ecology and behaviour of Silver Gulls and Fairy Terns in the Fremantle district, he was becoming increasingly interested in systematics, i.e. the distribution, evolution, classification and adaptations of birds. Equipped with a four-wheel drive vehicle he turned his attention in the mid-1960s to the eastern deserts of Western Australia, where he especially studied the quail-thrushes. His interest in this group later took him to Central Australia, western Queensland and western New South Wales.

In the 1970s he became interested in hybrid zones and in geographic barriers to the dispersal of birds. This required field work in northern Australia where, among other things, he studied the contact between adjacent subspecies and between adjacent vicariant species in the Lynd-Burdekin divide of North Queensland. The numerous high-quality scientific papers published in this period brought him world-wide recognition, including his election in 1982 as a Corresponding Fellow of the American Ornithologists Union. In that year he selected twelve of his most important scientific papers and wrote a commentary on them; he submitted this thesis to the University of Western Australia and was awarded the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the following year.

One of the last of the classical explorer-naturalists, Julian Ford also availed himself of the latest technology. He was skilled, for example, in many computer-based techniques of analysis. The

secret of his success was hard work and a sound methodology. In the field he observed and collected throughout the daylight hours, and at night he prepared and documented his specimens. In the Department of Ornithology at the Western Australian Museum (where he was appointed Honorary Associate in 1963) he examined his specimens. At WAIT his numerical data were subjected to rigorous analysis.

Julian Ford was a member of fourteen learned societies, including the Western Australian Naturalists' Club, which he joined in 1955 and served as secretary and vice-president. He also chaired various symposia, notably one on 'Fire as a Management Tool', which he organized for the WAIT Environmental Studies Group in 1985. His most lasting memorials will be the 130 scientific papers he published (mainly in the *Emu* and *Western Australian Naturalist*) and the 3000 or so study skins he donated to the Western Australian and other Museums. His bound hand-written field diaries, going back to 1949, are lodged in the Western Australian Museum.

Julian Ford tragically died before several of his projects were completed. Even so the quantity and quality of his work ensures him a high place in the annals of Australian natural history. He is survived by his wife Jennifer and daughters Rhoanna, Gretchen and Donnelee.

The following ten papers have been selected to show the range of Dr Ford's interests:

1958. Seasonal variation in populations of Anatidae at the Bibra Lake District, Western Australia. *Emu* 58: 31-41.
1960. On the taxonomic status of the south-western Australian chestnut-shouldered wrens. *West. Aust. Nat.* 7: 103-106.
1963. Breeding behaviour of the Yellow-tailed Thornbill in South-western Australia. *Emu* 63: 185-200.
1967. Nesting of Fairy Terns and Silver Gulls at Walyungup Lake, Western Australia. *West. Aust. Nat.* 10: 153-157.
1968. Distribution and variation of the skink *Ctenotus labillardieri* (Gray) of south-western Australia. *J. Proc. R. Soc. West. Aust.* 51: 68-75.
1974. Concepts of subspecies and hybrid zones and their applications to Australian ornithology. *Emu* 74: 113-123.
1980. Morphological and ecological divergence and convergence in isolated populations of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. *Emu* 80: 103-120.
1983. Speciation in the ground-thrush complex *Zoothera dauma* in Australia. *Emu* 83: 141-151.
1983. Evolutionary and ecological relationships between quail-thrushes. *Emu* 83: 152-172.
1986. Avian hybridization and allopatry in the region of the Einasleigh Uplands and Burdekin-Lynd Divide, North-Eastern Queensland. *Emu* 86: 87-110.